

TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING - MONDAY EVENING - APRIL 26, 2010

PRESENT: Marshall (arrived at 7:05 o'clock PM), Cordeiro,
Parella (arrived at 7:07 o'clock PM), Barboza, and Herreshoff

ALSO PRESENT: Diane C. Mederos, Town Administrator
John M. Day, Town Treasurer

The Council met in Special Session on Monday evening, April 26, 2010 in the Town Hall, Council Chambers beginning at 7:00 PM, Council Vice-chairman Cordeiro presiding:

Interviews:

Historic District Commission Auxiliary Member - Sara Butler

Ms. Butler of 133 Windward Lane appeared before the Council.

Councilman Cordeiro asked Ms. Butler to describe her interest in this position with Ms. Butler responding that she is a Bristol resident and has a strong interest in architectural history. She also explained that she has been seeking volunteer opportunities and found this one to be in alignment with her areas of interest.

Councilman Cordeiro stated that Bristol was fortunate to have many good volunteers willing to serve on boards and commissions.

Councilman Herreshoff stated that Ms. Butler's credentials were "impeccable" and noted that Ms. Butler has published extensively.

Ms. Butler noted that her papers include pieces on public art and historic landscapes.

Councilman Herreshoff stated that the Council is "proud of the Town" and that historic zoning is serving its purpose.

Ms. Butler noted that the Historic District Commission is guided by the Standards of the Secretary of the Interior and noted that these can be interpreted by the board. She added that the Historic District Commission has done an admirable job thus far.

Councilman Herreshoff suggested that the guidelines might be reviewed to afford the Commission the opportunity to "do only the good things."

Councilman Barboza stated that Ms. Butler appeared to be a "perfect fit" for the Historic District Commission.

Ms. Butler thanked the Council for its time and noted that she was definitely interested in the position.

Historic District Commission and Animal Shelter Capital Project Committee - Harold E. Tucker

Mr. Tucker of 10 Noyes Avenue appeared before the Council.

Councilman Herreshoff stated that he was very familiar with Mr. Tucker's qualifications and that he was of the opinion that Mr. Tucker's common sense would be useful on the Capital Project Committee.

Council Chairman Marshall arrived at this point in the meeting (7:00 o'clock PM) and assumed the chair and gavel:

Mr. Tucker agreed that he might be more useful on the Capital Project Committee due to his expertise in the building trades and education at Rhode Island School of Design. He added that the Historic District Commission opportunity was for an Auxiliary Member and that the term was fairly short before seeking reappointment.

Council Chairman Marshall asked to know what Mr. Tucker would "bring to the table" in consideration of the Capital Project with Mr. Tucker responding that he was very experienced in the building trades and that he was also experienced in reading blueprints, etc.

Councilwoman Parella arrived at this point in the meeting (7:07 o'clock PM).

Mr. Tucker suggested that the Committee might consider renovating the existing facility and adding to same or perhaps building something new on the existing site. He questioned the proposed location near San Francisco Avenue since he is of the opinion that site work, including an access road through wetlands, would be costly.

Councilman Barboza noted that the Council is informed that it is not possible to expand the current facility.

Councilman Herreshoff suggested that Mr. Tucker might consider, as a member of the Capital Project Committee, purchasing an existing vacant or underutilized building in Town and renovating it for use as an animal shelter versus building a completely new

one. He further stated that he hoped that the Committee would be open-minded.

Council Chairman Marshall asked Mr. Tucker to describe his interest in the Historic District Commission with Mr. Tucker responding that he has been interested in a seat on this Commission since its inception and that he attends meetings regularly and is also a resident of the Historic District.

Mr. Tucker stated that he would prefer a full-time Historic District Commission seat with Councilwoman Parella noting that Auxiliary Members are seated often and act upon cases.

Mr. Tucker expressed his opinion that the Historic District Commission should "guide" and that he was also of the opinion that the Commission is sometimes "too stringent" in its rulings.

Councilwoman Parella stated that she would favor leniency insofar as energy costs were concerned.

Mr. Tucker stated that he lives in a 100 year old house and that it has not been changed over the years.

Councilman Cordeiro noted that the Historic District Commission follows national guidelines and that the Commission would be "crucified" if the guidelines were not properly abided by.

Council Chairman Marshall thanked Mr. Tucker for his interest in both positions and noted that the Council will consider this matter at its regular meeting to be held on May 5, 2010.

FY 2010 Budget - Public Hearing

Council Chairman Marshall opened the public hearing at 7:15 o'clock PM.

Council Chairman Marshall noted that the process of the budget is never completed since the Council and Administration are constantly looking at ways to economize, etc.

William Sousa Grapentine of 10 Monterey Drive informed the Council that he was concerned since there appeared to be salary increases for Fire, Police, and Composting. He asked to know why contract negotiations were not "tougher" and why "generous increases" are proposed.

Council Chairman Marshall noted that the Council reviewed these matters in lengthy workshop sessions and that few persons were in attendance to hear the details. He also noted that most salaries were frozen last year and that the proposed increases are modest as compared to some granted in earlier years.

Council Chairman Marshall also explained that the Fire Department's budget now contains a line item for the Fire Marshal and that this was not a new position, further explaining that the salary for this "as needed" person was derived earlier from fee receipts. He noted that this change provides a greater level of transparency but no actual cost increase since the fees still offset the cost.

Council Chairman Marshall also noted that the Police budget allows for forty (40) officers versus the current thirty-eight (38) employed. He added that there is an approved total of forty-two (42) officers. He also noted that the budget allows for the department to have a supply of "recruits."

Council Chairman Marshall also noted that Town Administrator Mederos and Town Treasurer Day work together on contract negotiations and that employees are now paying for some of the employment and post-employment benefits.

Town Administrator Mederos added that Bristol is the only Town in Rhode Island that has a post-employment benefit contribution program.

Council Chairman Marshall also added that the Town is the beneficiary of a high tax collection rate and that its finances are fiscally healthy.

Council Chairman Marshall explained that the budget has a minimal capital improvement program due to the conditions of the economy and that he wishes that it could be larger.

Councilman Barboza reported that the State of Rhode Island is in poor economic straits and that the Town of Bristol is a "model" for the State. Councilman Barboza also suggested that those with great interest in the budget process should try to attend the public workshop sessions. He noted that the evidence that the budget was "bare bones" was more readily available when the Council reviews the details of each budget request.

Councilwoman Parella reiterated that the salary for the Fire Marshal was not in previous budgets but rather paid directly

from fees. She further noted that this amount, although properly stated, did give the impression of a large increase in the salary line.

Councilwoman Parella also noted that the changes in state mandates due to the tragedy of the Station Nightclub fire have been costly in terms of compliance requiring the Town to have additional inspection personnel.

Councilwoman Parella also explained that the Harbor Patrol costs are ultimately offset by the amounts derived from mooring and docking fees.

Councilwoman Parella also explained that the Town employees were granted modest wage increases. She noted that it would be difficult and inequitable to forego wage increases for Town employees when the "larger group" of school employees were all granted wage increases.

A discussion ensued regarding a discrepancy in the amounts listed for Harbor Patrol salaries with Town Treasurer Day and the Clerk agreeing to report back to the Council regarding this matter prior to the adoption of the budget on May 5.

A further discussion ensued regarding the State's reneging upon certain State Aid commitments thus leaving the Towns and Cities in a difficult financial position.

Councilman Herreshoff asked Town Treasurer Day to explain the status of the Town surplus with Mr. Day explaining that the Town has a surplus of approximately \$10 million and the Council has allocated approximately \$2 million of same to this year's budget. He added that the Town needs a surplus of in excess of \$4 million to maintain its bond rating, etc.

Councilman Herreshoff noted that the State may renege again and that FY 2012 may be "dangerous" due to the State's finances.

Council Chairman Marshall noted that the Town typically uses some surplus to offset the tax rate and that this is possible since the Town budgets at a collection rate of 96.5% and often collects at nearly 100%. Council Chairman Marshall also noted the Town's budget assumes that the State will not provide promised funding.

Councilman Herreshoff agreed that the State was "in an awful mess" and that the Town is fortunate to have its surplus.

Councilman Cordeiro noted that the local General Assembly delegation is interested in Bristol's fiscal practices.

Councilwoman Parella noted that the Town has a good financial position since it does not rely upon the promises of the State.

Peter Hewett of 11 Wendy Drive stated that he was concerned that the "rainy day fund" surplus was filling budget deficiencies and cautioned that the Town should not rely too heavily upon either the State or continued use of the surplus. He also suggested that the Council should observe the difference "between need and want" and urged the Council to be conservative when considering employee benefits. He further noted that the "days of great benefits are over."

Mr. Hewett suggested that the Town should focus on the cost of uniforms, vehicles, and home-to-work vehicle privileges; noting that these can be costly and that departments should be held accountable for ancillary costs.

Councilman Herreshoff stated that he welcomes Mr. Hewett's input and hopes that he will become even more interested in the budget process in the future. He added that the schools account for more than half of the Town's budget. He also added that the Town may be able to cut expenses through employee attrition.

Council Chairman Marshall stated that the Council views the budget as a continuous improvement project; looking for cost saving measures throughout the year.

Mr. Hewett asked who might be able to order a 5% cut "across the board" with Town Administrator Mederos responding that this would generally be the responsibility of the Town Administrator.

Mr. Hewett also stated that he was aware of the practice where departments in certain government operations spend down their unexpended budget amounts near the end of the year without regard for economies. Councilman Herreshoff agreed that he was once ordered to spend money irrationally while a naval officer. Councilman Herreshoff added that he was of the opinion that the Town department managers do not appear to have that mentality.

Mr. Hewett noted that the conventional wisdom is to do more with less with Councilman Herreshoff noting that a good part of the cost of government is in personnel expenses.

Councilman Barboza stated that he did not anticipate that foolish end of the year spending would be a practice in the Town.

Councilwoman Parella agreed, stating that the DPW, as an example, repairs trucks from used parts, etc., until these cannot be repaired any longer.

Mr. Hewett again reminded the Council that it may wish to limit the amount taken from the surplus since the State will likely be in "the hurt locker" for some time going forward.

Councilwoman Parella stated that she would prefer a small tax increase versus taking a too-large amount from the surplus. She added that employees tend to be careful with money since most are also taxpayers.

Councilman Herreshoff stated that the Council could have raised taxes and taken less from the surplus and also that it could have taken more and lowered taxes. He further stated that he was in favor of neither option and rather supports keeping the tax rate even with last year.

Council Chairman Marshall noted that the Town has an ordinance to keep a certain amount of surplus. He also noted that the collection rate adds to the surplus each year.

A discussion ensued regarding Town bonded indebtedness with Town Treasurer Day reporting a total bond debt of \$38 million with the rates ranging from 5% to below 3% for the SRF subsidized bonds.

Town Administrator Mederos noted that the Town negotiated co-pay percentages into its employment contracts since she took office. She also explained that the co-pays were not percentages before hand and are now approximately 13% of cost.

Town Administrator Mederos also observed that most departments live within their budgets and many "give back" at the end of the year and that she was not concerned about end of the year spending for the sake of spending. It was also observed that departments are not generally penalized for not spending their allocations.

Councilwoman Parella observed that the Council often will provide additional allocations if the departments "make their case" for a particular expenditure outside of the budget.

Georgina Macdonald of 125 Poppasquash Road noted that the Town appropriation of \$2 million from surplus might be considered as "eating one's seed corn." She expressed concern regarding overtime wages and the increases in the Emergency Medical and Harbor Patrol budgets; stating that these should be offset by third party billing and mooring, etc., fees.

It was noted that there are third party billings for Emergency Medical services and also offset revenue. It was suggested that these might become part of the advertised budget in the future.

Ms. Macdonald reminded the Council that she opposed the "Dryvit" library building and also expressed concern that the library budget was inconsistent with the reports which came forward when the new building was being planned. She asked why there were high amounts for repairs to a new building with Council Chairman Marshall responding that those amounts are for the payments for service contracts for the Library's mechanical systems.

Ms. Macdonald observed the 13% co-pay amount as described by Town Administrator Mederos and stated that this amount is more typically 20-25% in private industry.

Ms. Macdonald also expressed concern that the school budget line has grown dramatically despite new buildings and declining enrollments.

Mr. Hewett asked to know if the cuts as proposed by Commissioner Gist were factored into the budget with Councilman Barboza explaining that these were still unknown since the General Assembly has not approved the budget as yet.

Councilman Cordeiro noted that the Joint Finance Committee provides only a "bottom line" to the School Committee and that the School Committee determines its spending on individual line items.

John D. Sylvester of 1014 Hope Street noted the proposed budget for the Inauguration; stating that the two parties should pay this expense and not the Taxpayers.

A discussion ensued regarding this matter with the Council agreeing to take it under advisement.

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It was further noted that the matter of the Budget adoption will be considered on May 5, 2010 at the regularly scheduled Town Council meeting.

Parella/Barboza - Voted unanimously to close the public hearing.

There being no further business upon a motion my Councilwoman Parella seconded by Councilman Barboza and voted unanimously, the Chairman declared this meeting to be adjourned at 8:35 o'clock PM.

Louis P. Cirillo, CMC
Council Clerk